

PBS Lesson Series

ELA, Grade 8, Lesson 18

Teacher Packet

How does the author's craft, use of literary devices, character development, setting, and vocabulary develop the story, "The Gift of the Magi"?

In a brief essay, using your graphic organizer and your notes from today and yesterday, explain how the author writes. Be sure to include new vocabulary and specific examples from the text.

In the short story, “The Gift of the Magi”, O.Henry employs a variety of literary devices that engage and entertain the reader. O.Henry relays a narrative that describes two main characters, Della and John Dillignham on Christmas Eve. O.Henry’s use of allusion, simile, and imagery helps readers to be intrigued by, visualize, and relate to John and Della’s predicament.

O.Henry uses allusion to help readers to fully comprehend the value the characters place on two prized possession of the main characters, John’s watch and Della’s hair. The author alludes to queen Sheba’s jewels as he describes how treasured Della’s hair is. The author also uses allusion by referencing King Solomon’s treasures when describing how important John’s watch is to the couple. Both the queen of Sheba and King Solomon are famous royalty and by alluding to them in the story, O.Henry helps readers understand just how important these two items are.

“The Gift of the Magi” also includes several similes. For example, the author describes Della’s hair “rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters.” This simile not only engages readers, but it also helps readers picture that Della’s hair is beautiful, long, and flowing like a waterfall.

Additionally, the author uses imagery to intrigue and entertain the readers. The imagery in the short story also helps readers to form a mental images of the characters, plot, and setting. For example, after Della sells her hair for \$20 and is finally able to buy Jim a Christmas gift, the author says that Della ransacks the stores for the perfect gift. Because Della’s character is not portrayed as a thief or a wild creature, ransacking stores rather helps the reader to picture her shopping in a mad rush searching diligently for the perfect gift.

By employing allusion, similes, and imagery, O.Henry’s lively writing style keeps the reader’s mind entertained and helps the reader perfectly imagine the main characters, Della and John.

Graphic Organizer

Character name	Description

Plot

Themes

Key details

Vocabulary word/word choice	Meaning

Literary device	Meaning

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James (Jim)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once lived in prosperity, or got along fine financially • Now makes a lot less money than he once did and he is somewhat ashamed by it • He is happily married to Della and they have a home together

Literary device	meaning
Allusion	a reference designed to call something to mind
Simile	a comparison or metaphor that uses like or as
Imagery	visual symbolism
Metaphor	symbolic; the opposite of literal
Figurative language	non-literal language that helps readers to visualize what is being said

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation -as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch.

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Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant, or absentee, schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

“If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do-oh! What could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

Literary device	meaning
Allusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a reference designed to call something to mind • a reference to something in society
Simile	a comparison or metaphor that uses like or as
Imagery	visual symbolism
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At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered.

Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

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- “now she whispered”

Plot

- Della has been working for months to save money and that all that she has to show for it is one dollar and eighty-seven cents.
- It's Christmas Eve and she does not have enough money to buy the gift for Jim that she wants to buy for him.
- Della sells her hair for \$20 so that she can buy Jim a nice Christmas gift.
- Della searches through all the stores to find the perfect Christmas gift for Jim. She finally finds it - a platinum fob chain, which will pair perfect with his watch. Della goes home, fixes her hair, and prepares for Jim's arrival.

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Explain the ways the author helps us to understand Della's character.
Include details from the story today as well as what those details reveal about Della's character.
Use three of the vocabulary words in your summary.